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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000951

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI/SOMALIA: TFG TRAINING UPDATE; USG SUPPORT
REQUESTED

REF: 09 DJIBOUTI 881; 09 DJIBOUTI 919; 09 DJIBOUTI 913
09 DJIBOUTI 435

CLASSIFIED BY: James Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(A), (B), (D)

1.(C) Summary: As of July 15, the Government of Djibouti has begun training approximately 460 Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) recruits at the Hol Hol training site. The program is expected to last two-to-three months, with Djiboutian officials already making tentative plans for return of the group to Mogadishu in late September. According to the GODJ curriculum, the recruits will receive training in basic infantry skills, small-unit operations and tactics, orienteering, communications, etc. Meanwhile, the French are proceeding with plans to begin a six-week program of basic training in Djibouti for a group of 150 TFG recruits, with a further 350 to follow in September. To date, Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) has provided limited material support to the GODJ at the Hol Hol site, including tents, cots, water tanks, etc. which remain under GODJ control. Both TFG President Sharif and GODJ President Guelleh have requested USG support for the Djiboutian training of the TFG, and GODJ has specifically asked for transportation of the trainees from/to Mogadishu and personal kit (including uniforms and boots). Post recommends providing this modest assistance both (1) to advance the core USG objective in Somalia of quickly bolstering the TFG against extremist threats, and (2) to support our Djiboutian partners, who host the only U.S. military installation in sub-Saharan Africa (Camp Lemonier) and who, despite their meager means, have played a key role on Somalia by convening the "Djibouti process" and by providing vital diplomatic and military backing to the TFG. End Summary.

Djiboutian Training

12. (C) The approximately 460 trainees sent by the TFG have been assembled at the Hol Hol site since July 10 (Ref A). A July 12 visit by AFRICOM Deputy for Military Operations VADM Moeller, CJTF-HOA Commander RDML Kurta, and DCM found an orderly training site, with the recruits wearing basic uniforms and boots, although a few remained in tennis shoes due to insufficient Djiboutian stock. The trainees have been photographed and badged, and are subject to close oversight. During the site visit, the new recruits were practicing simple formations, and morale appeared good, with recruits singing during their exercises. According to the Djiboutian military commanders, the TFG trainees are undergoing the same basic training that the Djiboutian armed forces use for their own recruits, with the same instructors. To assist the GODJ, CJTF-HOA has provided limited material support at the Hol Hol site, notably tents, cots, small generators, and a non-potable water

tank, among other similar items - all of which remain under the control of the GODJ.

13. (C) Ambassador and Security Cooperation Officer met July 16 with Acting Chief of Defense Staff, Major General Zakaria Cheick Ibrahim, for an update on the training. The formal training began July 15, after completion of physical evaluations that led to the exclusion of several recruits on medical grounds (poor eyesight, debilitating injuries, etc.) and quarantine of about twenty for an infectious skin ailment that is being treated by Djiboutian army medical personnel. Zakaria confirmed that the training would last for two months, in accordance with TFG President Sharif's request to Djiboutian President Ismail Omar Guelleh for short-duration training on an urgent basis so that the TFG can field additional combatants as soon as possible. As outlined in the Djiboutian training curriculum (scanned and emailed July 6 to AF/E, AF/RSA, and the Somalia Unit), the program includes basic infantry skills, urban ambush scenarios, small unit operations and tactics, navigation and orienteering, and other core competencies. Zakaria said the program would also include a "civics" component designed to improve the recruits' "morals" and understanding that they are fighting for a national government. Security Cooperation Officer later learned that the Djiboutians are tentatively preparing to return the trained recruits to Mogadishu immediately following the end of Ramadan, with the first rotation o/a September 22.

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14. (C) Separately, Ambassador and other mission staff met with TFG Colonel Mahdi Arif Ali and Somali Embassy DCM Abdourahman Mohamed Hiraabe, who underscored that President Sharif seeks rapid completion of the training and return of the group to Mogadishu, but said they would be open to a program lasting up to three months (Ref B). Mahdi indicated that a sub-set of the trainees who perform well may be kept in Djibouti longer for specialized close-protection training. He said the recruits are not currently receiving any payment while in Djibouti, but are being lodged, fed, and clothed. Mahdi continued to have frustratingly few details of plans for integration of the trainees into TFG forces upon their return to Somalia. On this point, he largely deferred to the TFG leadership, except to say that there were many officers and weapons available in Mogadishu and that the TFG's main challenge is to find enough fighters. Stressing the urgency to train additional troops, Mahdi said he was eager to bring in a second contingent of 500 TFG recruits to be trained by the GODJ. Ambassador recommended that the TFG and GODJ give priority to successful completion of training the first contingent before bringing the additional 500.

French Training

15. (C) Both French Ambassador Dominique Decherf and Commander of French Forces in Djibouti (FFDJ) Brigadier General Philippe LeFort confirmed to Ambassador that France expects the arrival of 150 TFG recruits beginning July 18 via commercial air for a six-week program of basic infantry skills. The training will be provided by FFDJ trainers already in Djibouti, where France conducts extensive training activities throughout the year at Arta range and other French sites. Both Decherf and LeFort stressed that the training would be of short-duration per the TFG leadership's request. In keeping with the French commitment to train a total of 500 TFG, Decherf said a further group of 350 is expected for a second six-week training program, to begin in late September after the end of Ramadan.

Ugandan Lessons Learned

¶16. (SBU) Three Ugandan officers are due to arrive in Djibouti July 17 to share lessons learned from their experience conducting a six-month training program for TFG forces at Bihanga, Uganda (October 2008 to March 2009). The Ugandans are scheduled to meet July 18 with representatives of the TFG, GODJ, U.S. (Embassy and CJTF-HOA), and French at the FFDJ headquarters in Djibouti. Among the topics of discussion will be how to incorporate key elements from the much longer Ugandan training program into the shorter-duration training now sought urgently by the TFG.

Comment

¶17. (C) In response to requests by TFG President Sheikh Sharif for urgent training of new recruits, the GODJ and French are stepping up to fulfill this requirement. The TFG is also showing welcome initiative by marshaling recruits, carefully collecting their names and personal data to establish proper monitoring and eventually accountability for payment and weapons issuance, and getting them on flights to Djibouti and into the training programs.

¶18. (C) Both the TFG (Sheikh Sharif) and the GODJ (President Guelleh) have asked for USG support for this training (Refs C and D). The GODJ has specifically requested that we provide or fund (1) transport of the trainees from/to Somalia and (2) trainee equipment, notably personal kit for the recruits. Post strongly recommends a favorable response to these senior-level TFG and GODJ requests. This modest USG contribution would advance our core goal in Somalia of bolstering the TFG in the face of aggressive

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al-Shabaab and Hisbul-al-Islam threats, and be a visible demonstration of our support to Sheikh Sharif. A USG contribution would also reinforce Djibouti's very significant role in Somalia peace efforts - as host of the "Djibouti process," as a forceful advocate for the TFG in diplomatic fora (IGAD, AU, Arab League), and as a provider of direct assistance (including arms and ammunition to the TFG in May and now military training) when the TFG has faced critical threats. And, of course, we have broader strategic interests in our relationship with Djibouti, which is home to the only U.S. military installation in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as refueling and resupply facilities used frequently by U.S. naval vessels (more than 40 so far this calendar year).
SWAN